

# **Oliver Smith Rankin collection**

## **S1093**

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October 29, 2014

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Rare Books and Manuscripts  
140 North Senate Avenue  
Indianapolis, Indiana, 46204  
317-232-3671

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Title</b>	Oliver Smith Rankin collection
<b>Date</b>	1863-1951
<b>Extent</b>	0.01 Cubic feet 1 folder
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Text [Folder]</b>	S1093

### Preferred Citation

Oliver Smith Rankin collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Indiana State Library

## Biographical Note

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Oliver Smith Rankin served in the 10th Indiana Volunteer Regiment during the Civil War, and was shot as a spy by Confederates after providing valuable information before the Battle of Chickamauga.

Nelly Colfax Smith, who lived at 2122 North New Jersey Street, Indianapolis, in 1948, gathered information about her uncle, Oliver Smith Rankin, and wrote a story entitled "The Nathan Hale of the Rebellion." She gathered sworn statements and affidavits from men who knew Oliver during the war.

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection includes handwritten and typed copies of affidavits and sworn statements dating from 1864 through 1949 concerning Oliver Smith Rankin, from the 10th Indiana Volunteer Regiment, who was executed as a spy during the Civil War. Oliver was from Greencastle, Indiana, and resigned his commission in the U.S. Army so he could be on detached service in the Secret Service under the chief of army police, Col. Trussdail, and also under General Rosecrans of the Army of the Cumberland. Oliver gave information to Generals Rosecrans and Thomas that General James Longstreet had arrived to reinforce General Braxton Bragg before the Battle of Chickamauga.

In May 1864, General James Garfield gave a speech, recorded in the Congressional Globe, about Oliver who was "a generous and patriotic young man, engaged in a most perilous and difficult enterprise in the service of his country." In 1865, General William Rosecrans wrote: "I cannot however think Mr. Rankin is lost. It may be you will hear from him when you least expect it." This letter contains the note that Rev. B. Wilson Smith, Valparaiso, Indiana, to whom the letter was written, was the brother-in-law of Oliver Rankin, "having married Mr. Rankins' sister Ruth Anna Rankin."

In 1909, Loyd Cecil wrote about the execution of Oliver on the farm of George Polk, five miles from Columbia, Tennessee, in 1863. He stated: "After the war the bones of a human being were found there by a fox hunter and a negro." William E. Ludlow, Adjutant General of the 10th Indiana, wrote in 1911 that he had a distinct recollection of Oliver Rankin, who "was a big fine-looking fellow of pleasing personality, ... a jolly good fellow and a great favorite with everyone."

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## Arrangement

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This collection is arranged chronologically.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

Rare Books and Manuscripts

### Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

### Conditions Governing Use

Legal title, copyright, and literary rights reside with Rare Books and Manuscripts, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, IN. All requests to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted to Rare Books and Manuscripts.

### Custodial History

This collection was received by Rare Books and Manuscripts as a donation from Nelly Colfax Smith, niece of Oliver Smith Rankin, on 1951/01/30.

### Accruals

No further additions are expected.

### Processing Information

Collection processing and finding aid completed 2014/10/16 by Nikki Stoddard Schofield.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### Geographic Name(s)

- Greencastle (Ind.)

**Personal Name(s)**

- Rankin, Oliver Smith

**Subject(s)**

- Affidavits
- Civil war